

**Education Committee Testimony**  
**Testimony Regarding School Construction Funds for Charter Schools**  
**& Support for HB 5283 and SB 229**  
**Friday, March 4th, 2022**

**Co-Chairs Senator McCrory and Representative Sanchez and distinguished members of the Education Committee:**

I am John Taylor, the founding Principal and Executive Director of Booker T. Washington Academy in New Haven. BTWA educates 99% students of color, 82% of our population receive free or reduced-price lunch, and roughly 17% of our students receive SPED or ELL services. In 2018, BTWA was named a School of Distinction by the State Department of Education. BTWA believes that with a rigorous academic program, high scholar expectations, and strong moral character, scholars can create pathways to success in school, college, and life. We are a school rooted in community, many of you have been to visit or met with our families over the years, our board is diverse and comprised of parents, community and local business leaders.

Our diverse staff of 62% people of color, work tirelessly daily to ensure our scholars have access to those pathways, regardless of their educational needs. This is a difficult task to accomplish when we face a growing list of obstacles. Right now, charter school students do not receive full funding for their individualized learning needs, placing undue burden on our school to do right by our students. To stretch our resources even further, we are forced to use our limited state funding on facility repairs and ADA compliance concerns instead of student instruction and programming. To help remedy this, I am asking that you please support H.B. 5283 to fund all our students based on what they need and that the state provides public charter schools with access to funds for maintaining and improving our facilities.

I also have the privilege of recently being selected, by the Danbury Planning Committee, as the operator of Danbury Charter School, once fully approved and funded to open. Danbury Charter School was awarded an initial certificate of approval by the CT State Board of Education in 2018 but was unable to open, due to the current authorization process. This current two-step authorization process prevents communities and families, such as the proposed charter school from Danbury before you today, from accessing quality schools they have arduously fought for and need for the betterment of their children's future.

Unfortunately, I have a profound understanding, due to lived experience, of how difficult it is to open a high-performing charter school without adequate resources or a timely runway. In 2014, I was charged with opening BTWA in less than a month. While we were ultimately successful, this was much less than ideal. We hope to be approved and state-funded to open the doors of Danbury Charter School for the 2022/23 school year. This will give us a longer runway to ensure we have a high-quality International Baccalaureate program for the deserving students in Danbury.

I ask that this committee approve S.B. 229 so future potential charter school operators and eager communities do not experience the same hardships we have. When the State Board and a local community work together to authorize a new public charter school, the State Department of Education should be positioned with the funding in place to meet students' needs.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Education Committee Co-Chairs- Senator Doug McCrory and Representative Bobby Sanchez and the other members of the committee for allowing me to provide testimony on these critical issues.

Thank you for your time.